

Crimson Motive

By: pyrofreeze

Behind every action, there is a motive, and no matter how selfcentered it is, there is a justification for everything, even if only one person believes in it. No person is except from this law: not even the Akatsuki.

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Motivation

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Prologue- Motivation

A/N: I started writing this on a whim really, and I will continue to do so just as impulsively, so don't expect regular updates. I'll write and complete stories for this as inspiration strikes me. And please, don't take the tales of how the various Akatsuki to be cannon: I'm just writing this for fun, and to explore possibilities for each of the Akatsuki member's background. Truly, this isn't one story, but a bunch of one-shots that (in the end) you should be able to read in any order at your leisure without much care for what order you read them in. I hope you enjoy them, and I really do hope be able to write, and complete a few member's stories, seeing as this "chapter" is only an introduction to them.

Warnings: mention of alcohol, and violence in future chapters.

Motivation : The psychological feature that arouses an organism to act toward a desired goal; the reason for the action; that which gives purpose and direction to behavior.

No man is ever born believing that he is destined to be a murderer. No human child ever dreamed of a future paved in crimson blood, staining everything in a malicious scarlet. Being a criminal has never been on anyone's "what I want to be when I grow up" list, and never before was there a murderer without a motive, or a reason for his crime. Without a reason to do so, no man willing bathes himself in blood, for once you've killed, your hands will always be stained red. No matter how many times you wash your hands, you can never wash away your crimes. Red is the mark, the color of a murderer... Red: The color of blood, symbolic of pain, death, and suffering. The only other color to bear anywhere as close an ominous feel as red is

black: the color of night, of darkness, of death, and of the end. Crimson clouds on a midnight sky: that was their symbol; the symbol of murders, the symbol of the Akatsuki.

They were ruthless, merciless, cruel, cold, concise... and human above all. And though their day job consisted of running around killing people, they yet had the components of any other human being. They needed food and drink to sustain themselves, shelter to protect themselves from the elements, and finally, the pleasure of the company of others.

It was a rare thing indeed that they all could get together; usually they were all out on missions, but today there wasn't any work to do, and no people to kill. And so they all sat together around a long table-all so different and looking so out of place in each other's company-drinking some good strong sake, and enjoying a few rare moments of peace that was rarely found in the lives of professional assassins.

Perhaps it was a desire to socialize that spurred off the conversation, or perhaps it was just the sake, but at some point, the group of killers began a conversation. It began with sporadic comments, and then progressed to brief commentary on killing styles, and somehow, somehow, it became an actual discussion.

"So." Kakuzu managed to slur out as he nursed his own bottle of sake, "I always kinda wondered... what some of you were doing here..."

"W-What do you mean Kakuzu-sempai?" Tobi questioned, nervously holding a bottle of sake like his comrades, but not drinking a sip.

"What I MEAN kid, is sometimes I wonder how some of you people got here to begin with. How you guys turned murders, missing-nin and then Akatsuki members."

Kisame let out a boisterous deep chuckle and shook his head. "You act as if becoming a traitor to one's homeland is something we think

through thoroughly-as if it were a goal we wished to obtain from the start!"

"Then why are YOU here fish head?" Kakuzu asked drunkenly, "Isn't killing all you've ever done? I mean, you're a former Mist ninja, and everyone *knows* that Mist ninja are brutal."

"There's much more to Mist ninja then that." Kisame replied hotly, taking another swig from his own bottle of alcohol, "Nothing is ever as simple as you think it is Kakuzu."

"Then tell me," Kakuzu taunted, "tell me what Mist ninja were *really* like. Tell me why you're here."

Kisame growled slightly, and drained the rest of his drink. "Fine! I will. So listen up, and listen closely, because I'm not telling the story twice! But first I'm going to need some more sake."

A/N: If you want to review, or send any suggestions, I'll be happy to receive them. ;)

Pyrofreeze

Chapter 1 Preview: Hoshigaki Kisame

"When I was born, I've been told that the nurse delivering me screamed."

To Prove Them Wrong

Chapter 1- To Prove Them Wrong: Hoshigaki Kisame's Story

A/N: Sorry it took so long for me to finish Chapter 1, but for some reason it wasn't working out as I wanted it to, and ended up taking much longer to do than I had originally planned. But thankfully it's quite a bit longer than the Introduction. -smiles sheepishly- I can't make any promises, but hopefully I'll be able to finish the next chapter quicker.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything... except a certain sword-wielding kunoichi that you'll meet soon enough ;)

It was several bottles of sake later that Kisame's tongue was finally loose enough to tell his tale. After one final long swallow of sake, the murderer leaned forward, his loose posture indicating that he was intoxicated to a degree.

"The first thing you need to understand about Mist ninja is that they are just like any other ninja from any other village." Kisame began, stating the fact in a rather final tone that often would cause most people not to question the statement; but of course, Kakuzu was not most people.

"Hey Fish-face, you can't just make a statement like that and not back it u-"

"If you would shut UP for one second and let me *tell the story* you'll get you explanation!" Kisame growled back menacingly. Kakuzu muttered angrily under his breath, but Kisame paid him no heed and continued on with his tale.

"As I was *saying*, Mist ninja are primarily like any other ninja nation; alongside ninja was have normal citizen in our town, and people are

just as kind, and as cruel as anywhere else."

"So how did you get here sempai?" Tobi inquired, "How did you end up a member of the Akatsuki?"

The room was quiet for a few minutes as Kisame rubbed his chin thoughtfully as thinking of his answer before starting to tell his tale.

"When I was born," he began, "I've been told that the nurse delivering me screamed. I suppose she had never seen any child like me before in her career, so her reaction was completely understandable I suppose. You see, I was born as you see me now: blue skin, the edges of sharp teeth already poking out of my gums, gills, shark eyes and all. I wasn't a normal child by any standards, and she didn't have a clue as to what to do. Of course, none of them recovered from the shock truly; they were disgusted by me, and just a little scared, and my father refused to acknowledge me as his child. As for my mother... she died giving birth to me, and she never saw me, and for that, I am thankful. It was because of that that I was able to disillusion myself in my childhood into thinking maybe, just maybe, my mother wouldn't have been frightened of me like everyone else was."

"My father-whom to this day I do not know-left me to live in the Mist village's small orphan inch where I spent the first 10 years of my life."

"Hey, wait," Hidan interrupted, "If you didn't know your dad, then... where did you get your last name? Where in the world did 'Hoshigaki' come from?"

Kisame looked mildly irritated and shook his head before looking vaguely embarrassed. "Well, it came about in a rather... er... unpleasant encounter involving a great deal of fish, a perverted old man, and a persimmon fruit... I'd rather not talk about it."

Everyone in the room gave him an odd look, but Kisame simply cleared his throat and continued with his tale. "It wasn't easy being an orphan," he began, "but in a ninja village, it rarely is. And for me,

it was especially difficult due to my... *unusual* appearance." Kisame chuckled bitterly and took a long swig from a new bottle of sake. "I suppose that's what made me tough though, and it made me who I am today. As soon as I was big and strong enough, I stood up to anyone who dared to try and mess with me, and soon it was time for registration into the Ninja Academy. I applied at once, giddy at a chance to get away from the orphan inch, and for a chance to prove myself. I only wanted to become a ninja, nothing else. I didn't anticipate wanting anything more than the name; I didn't want the glory, or the bonds, or any of that at the time... just the name 'ninja' was enough. Of course, like many things do, it all changed with a girl..."

"Oh, so little ol' Kisame's got himself a girlfriend back home?" Hidan teased, "I never would have guessed."

"Shut it Hidan, it wasn't anything like that." Kisame told him gruffly, "She was... an interesting girl who was the same as I was. You see, we were both orphans that had just managed to miss each other back at the orphan inch; it was a big place, so it was understandable. The first time I met her was at the Academy: we were the only two orphaned potential genins that had managed to get into the ninja academy that year. I remember that day well even now... The first time she saw me, she punched me right in the face; *Hard*. She always did have a good left hook..."

"She'd been training, and had been so engrossed that she hadn't heard me approach, and had punched me by accident. Of course, she was hardly apologetic about the whole ordeal. She simply told me that I 'needed to watch where I was going'. She was unlike any other girl I'd ever met before. Later on I often told her she was more of a boy than a girl... any time I said that however, I usually ended up with a few more bruises. And her appearance was just as odd as her behavior; she had short black hair at a time where all the girls wore it long, and a tanned complexion that highlighted the most chilling pair of gray eyes I think I've ever seen. But getting back to the point, she was someone who influenced my life more than I can

ever probably imagine. One thing we shared in common was that she too had been abandoned by her family at the orphan inch, but for different reasons. I found out why for the first time after school one day when I waved my hand in front of her and she didn't respond. I remember I mouthed several rude things and obscenities to her, and how she didn't blink once; she never clenched her fists, or got angry, but just simply asked what it was that I wanted from her.

She had been born blind, and they believed that she would never be fine ninja, like her mother, nor that she would be of any use as a blacksmith like her father; that's why she went to the Academy: To prove them wrong."

"We didn't quite get along at first, probably because we were both so similar and didn't want to admit it. We were cold, cruel people who had grown up without parents, friends or love, and we didn't think we needed anyone more than ourselves. But as you get older, such silly childish believes are washed away, and we realized things that we've needed all along. At some time in the Academy the two of us realized our own yearnings for the company of others... and we were afraid, and oh so bitter. That was when we became... cohorts of sorts. It was after our teacher told her that with her blindness, she'd never be a proper ninja, despite how well I knew she was doing, and how good of a fighter she was. I told her then that I believed in her, and it was then that I think we realized that we would need someone other than ourselves. That we needed a comrade to help us if we fell, and so, we swore an oath to each other that day: an oath to have each other's backs, because no one else would. It was that day that she told me her name. To the class, she was 'girl' or 'the blind one', and the teachers always called her 'miss'."

"So who's this mystery girl?" Kakuzu interrupted, "get on with it already!"

Kisame smirked. "Her name was Samehada."

"Like your sword?" Deidara asked incredulously.

"If you would stop *interrupting me* you wouldn't need to ask questions!" Kisame grumbled, "Now, as I was saying... the two of us became companions of sort, so when we both finally passed the Genin exams and became part of the same team, we were thrilled. We weren't even really fazed that we had had to kill one of our classmates to pass either; each and ever one of our classmates had hated us anyway. Our third teammate-a boy named Sato Haru-was less then thrilled to be teamed up with the academy freaks, and I'm afraid to say he never really overcame his prejudice. Also, our Sensei automatically made assumptions about us and never got to know us well, basically disabling us all from ever working well as a team. But that was o.k. with Samehada and I; we didn't trust anyone other then each other anyway. So we let our Sensei concentrate on training Haru, while the two of us trained together under the cover of night in secret. It was during one of those nightly training sessions that Samehada revealed to me of her secret project: a sword, but not just any sword; a great sword that would become her ultimate weapon."

"And so we wove our wonderful little world of secrets and masks, and plays that we put on whenever others were around. It was almost a game for us at first before our missions truly became serious. We pretended to be weaker then we were so that when the time came, we would reveal our power and prove to everyone how wrong they had been about us. So I practiced my precision and killing techniques, and Samehada continued her secret blacksmithing of a weapon she hoped would be the greatest ever made."

"At first however, all her effects were meaningless. Her arms were always covered completely in bandages, hiding the accidental wounds she had received while working with red-hot iron, anvils, furnaces, and other such dangerous equipment blacksmiths used. There was a period of time I admit where I almost told her to give up, but even if I *had* spoken my mind at the time, I don't think she would have stopped anyway. She wanted so badly to prove everyone

wrong, even though she said she didn't care what people thought of her. I... sympathized with her to a degree, and so I let her continue."

"Summer turned to Fall, and Fall to Winter, and Winter to Spring, and so 2 years passed, and we grew as ninjas. We developed our skills, and finally when the two of us became-reluctant on the village council's part-Chuunin, Samehada finally constructed the weapon she had dreamed of ever night since she had only been a child at the orphan inch. It was a great sword, and as it had been her family's tradition, she gave it a name and called it 'Isonade', and began to train with it. It was the perfect sword for her, because she had weaved her own chakra into it so that it became her eyes; it guided her hand, and it always lead her, letting her hand follow... And though it was a good sword, she wanted something that was even more powerful, and so she began working on *it* ; a sword that she would put so much of her chakra, blood, and sweat, and tears and time into that it felt like she and the sword were *one* . It became an all consuming activity to her; whenever she wasn't on a mission, she was working on that sword that was so important to her... a sword that had become so important to her that she had forgotten me, her one, and only comrade in a world that didn't believe in her. Even though she denied it vehemently, I knew she was doing it all to prove them wrong; to prove that she was worth something, and that she could do anything that they thought she couldn't. And though I understood, I felt angry, and as if she had forgotten our promise. I thought that she had turned her back on me, as if we had never made an oath to each other to never do just that."

"When the sword was complete, it was colossal, and unnamed as of yet when she brought it on a C-ranked body-guard mission... it was supposed to have been an easy mission: escort the daughter of some guy back to her home. It was a pity we didn't know that there were some ninjas out to kidnap the girl for ransom, or we would have made them pay more money to be escorts... It was that day that I first saw that sword in action. I was amazing the way it moved; it always knew where she wanted to move, because it flowed so fully with her chakra that she and it were almost one *being* . She swung it

with such expertise that me, and even Haru-who had always been skeptical of us, and who had hated us-believed that the enemy didn't stand a chance. The sword was amazing and it sapped up chakra from enemies, making it a very formidable weapon indeed. But they kept coming, and in the end, they defeated Samehada and retreated when Haru went to attack them. At the time, Haru was hardly injured and ran to get help and left me, injured and bleeding with a dying Samehada. My wounds weren't too detrimental; they would heal, but Samehada... I knew it was hopeless the moment I saw the extent of the damage she had taken. They had been brutal to her, and looking back and remembering all the blood on her, I'm not sure how she even managed to stay alive those last few minutes to utter her last words to me.

"'Kisame', she had whispered, her voice garbled and choked by her own blood, 'Kisame... I'm going to die aren't I?'"

"I didn't lie to her; I simply told her 'Yeah, probably.' She laughed bitterly at that."

"'I guess that's the fate of ninja.' She told me, 'to die young, and without accomplishing their dreams.' And so I asked her what her dream was, and she had predictably replied, 'To prove them wrong... to make them see how wrong they were to treat us like outcasts, and to prove how powerful we were... but we never did prove it did we?' she asked, 'We never proved to them that we were more than their eyes can see.' I remember she looked me straight in the face then, and grabbed me, looking into my eyes as if she were looking at me, and seeing me, though I knew she could not. 'Make another oath to me Kisame!' she told me fiercely, blood dripping down her chin, and her face growing paler, and paler, 'Promise me two last things Kisame.' I told her that I'd promise her anything in her last moments, and so I heard her requests. 'Promise... that you'll show them all what we're made of, and make them sorry for thinking of us as insignificant rats, and...' she paused to cough for a moment before making her final request, 'Promise me that you'll take up this sword, and honor it. Promise me to wield it well, and to name it for me.' I

told her 'I Promise', and then she smiled a smile truer than I had ever seen on her face before and said 'Good... now look out for yourself buddy... and watch where you're going o.k.? You never know when some blind girl might punch you by accident because you weren't paying any attention to where you were going.'"

Kisame laughed bitterly, "Weird last words for a weird woman I suppose... Well, at least she died with a smile on her face..."

Kisame shook his head and his face grew serious suddenly, "When Haru got back, the medic nin healed my wounds and left, not bothering to help me with Samehada's body. Haru was at least kind enough to walk with me back to town, but that was all he did before disappearing and leaving me with her body. He didn't even offer money for a funeral; no one did, and I couldn't pay for it, so I cremated her, and let her ashes fly free; I think she would have liked that better than a burial anyway... and I almost went back to life, but something was fishy about the way she had died, and how not even the village council was willing to give her a proper honorable burial... there was something strange about how the enemies we had fought attacked only Samehada and I, and how Haru had gotten away unscathed, and it was strange how well they combated our best moves... in short, I suspected conspiracy, and no one even bothered to hide the fact that Samehada's death was no accident. The only accident was that I didn't die too. We were troublemakers at best, sometimes freaks, and at the worst, village outcasts that were unwanted. And so it was then that I decided to follow through with the first promise I made to Samehada; I went to prove the village wrong, and to show them just exactly how wrong they were about me and Samehada, and I showed them our power."

"I murdered them all; all 10 seated members of the council and countless others that had blocked my path there, and out of the village as I ran from the gates as an S-Class criminal, and I was only able to do so with that nameless sword. When I wielded it... I felt as if *she* were there, guiding *my* hand as her sword the Isonade had once guided her... and so, it was then, as I took my flight from the

village to find somewhere safe, that I whispered to the sword its name: *Samehada* ."

"So after that, the Akatsuki heard of the all people you had massacred with your own hands, and offered you a place, and asylum with them?" Deidre asked. Kisame merely shook his head in confirmation.

"Yeah, that's pretty much all there is to the story." He confirmed, beginning to take a last swig of sake before glancing down and seeing that it was empty. "Ahhh... I'm out; I think I'll just go get another case. If you'll excuse me..." Kisame stood, and shouldered his gigantic sword and left the room.

"Bring enough for all of us!" Hidan called after him before turning back to the group. Once the shark-like man had left he chuckled and nudged Kakuzu. "What a story eh? I wonder if it's true..."

"B-But Hidan-sensei, why would Kisame-sempai lie?" Tobi asked curiously.

"Dunno, but we all got our secrets kid... whatever. It's just a little... to sentimental for my taste, and I never thought of Kisame as a 'sentimental' kind of guy, so I find his story a *little* hard to believe... my *own* story isn't sentimental and gushy at all!"

"Oh yeah Hidan? What's your story then?" Kakuzu leered, "It's probably pretty lame."

"Heck no!" Hidan exclaimed, "It's probably better then the story of how YOU got to be here!"

"Want to make that a bet?" Kakuzu asked raising an eyebrow.

"You're on!"

Kisame stood lazily on the cliff outside the Akatsuki's headquarters staring into the sunset shoulder the sword, his mind not on the sake he had planned to get at all.

"The sunset's beautiful, eh Samehada?" he chuckled, "But you never did get to see it, did you? We used to watch it together, even though really all we were doing was talking together in a time when the sun happened to be setting... It was during a sunset that we made *that* promise, remember?" He shook his head and faced the wind, and leaned against his sword as he stared out over the cliff. "You never did forget that promise you made, eh Samehada." He whispered, "Even now... you still have my back."

A/N: Well... I'm not entirely sure what the response to this chapter will be. It's a bit more... *sentimental* than I originally had planned, but I'm fairly pleased with how it turned out. Next up will be the story of how Hidan came to join the Akatsuki...

Terms You Might Care To Know:

1- 'Hoshigaki' is a dried persimmon, hence the mentions of the fruit being involved in the tale of how he got his last name.

2- 'Isonade' in Japanese mythology was legendary dark blue shark attracted to blood with a subordinate fish named 'Samehada'. This is why Samehada's sword Isonade guides her hand, or leads her.

Pyrofreeze

Blessing From the Gods

Chapter 2-Blessing From the Gods: Hidan's Story

A/N: Well, here's Chapter 2 at last! Before I begin, let me first say that any similarities you may see between real religions and spiritual beliefs and the religion(s)/belief(s) mentioned in the following chapter are purely unintentional. Oh, and if you're squeamish about blood and violence, you probably shouldn't read this chapter.

Disclaimer: I don't own anything you recognize as being from the anime/manga Naruto.

"I hope none of you guys are squeamish about blood," Hidan began, chuckling, "Because if so, I probably shouldn't continue on with my tale."

"Just get on with it Hidan," Kakuzu complained, "unless you want to loose the bet..."

"No way!" Hidan grumbled, "You'll see! This'll be the one bet you'll never win! The story of how I came to the Akatsuki is WAY more interesting then your own tale!"

"We'll see about that." Kakuzu murmured, "Just get on with it!"

"Fine." Hidan huffed, "Well... I suppose the proper place to begin is the beginning of my life in a small little town in the Grass Country, not far from the wall of the great ninja city hidden in the grass."

"My father was a street peddler, and my mother was a painter. In short, we were dirt poor; you don't make much off selling little trinkets on the street, and you never hit it big selling art unless your dead. They didn't really have enough to support themselves, let alone a child... and while they were happy at my birth, they were afraid too; they had no clue how to provide for me. They didn't have money to

feed me properly, or for tuition into school; they couldn't even give me decent clothing, so they were at a bit of a loss as to what to do... So when an offer was put before them that would insure that I would grow up with clean clothes on my back, and with hot food in my stomach, they understandably accepted at once."

"What "offer" was put before them Hidan-sempai?" Tobi asked curiously, cocking his head to one side.

"They shipped me off to live with monks and to serve as an alter boy of course."

Kakuzu burst out in loud boisterous laughter at that. "YOU?! A monk? An *alter boy* ?! That's rich!"

Hidan glared, and slammed his drink down on the table with a loud '**Thud**', "Shut up you! Its not like *I* chose to be sent off to live in some cloister! I was only 3 when it happened, so my memories of my parents are vague blurs of color, faces, and voices. Most of what I know of that woman and man I learned from the monks at the monastery. After that day when they shipped me off to live in some mountains on the other side of the country's Hidden Village, I never saw them again."

"Oh, that's so sad Hidan-sensei!" Tobi exclaimed, "Don't you ever wish that-"

"No. I don't." Hidan hissed, cutting off the mask-wearing youth harshly. "I don't care about those people at all." Hidan cleared his throat and continued on, as if Tobi hadn't ever brought up his parents at all. "Anyway, my childhood was a dull one; I was always surrounded by usually bald men in robes, and to this day I'll never forget the smell of the temple's incense: they were a mix of the smell of smoke, jumbled in with the fragrance of rain, and the scent of something sweet, but forever unidentifiable to me. My days were filled with the sound of bells, and the chanting of monks in different tongues-some of which I knew not a word of, and some that I understood perfectly-all blending together into one single mantra that

seemed to mean everything and nothing at the same time. It was an odd existence certainly, considering that every day was jumble of prayer, chanting, and ceremonies, but I was never without food, clothing, and shelter, and that monastery-at the time-was all I had known, and as such, I was used to that life. In those early years, I was very different from how I am now: I was innocent, obedient, and had bought into the "holy", and "be kind and good to all" crap they fed me each day... but could you really blame me? After all, those walls and those people were all I had ever known. I never considered any other options, and I never thought of the world outside of the temple's walls; at the time, I thought it was unimportant... that was, until *he* came. When I first saw him, I was er... *startled* by his appearance..."

"Or rather you were scared." muttered Kakuzu under his breath smugly.

"Shut it! I was *not* scared!" hissed Hidan, "And anyway, I was just *ten*, and this guy was *massive* . He looked as though he were a tree that had been carved into the form of a man, and his face was chiseled with deep marks and scars, like the deep wrinkles and lines that are scrawled across the bark of trees. His skin too, was the color of bark, which was fitting for a man who so reminded me of a constant, immovable tree. He was so mysterious, so inapproachable, so steady, so different... and it scared the elders; they didn't like him, and so they shooed him into a corner of the temple in his own little hut so they could forget he existed, and ignore him. His reaction was really odd when they showed him his "home"; he didn't protest as I had anticipated. He didn't say or do *anything*... he only smirked, as if amused by their fear. At that moment, I experienced a dangerous new emotion that I had never truly felt before... *curiosity* .

Curiosity is truly the most perilous emotion one can feel; it is much akin to a hunger that will not leave you until you quench it with knowledge. I *wanted* to know who this mysterious man was, and that *curiosity* that I had was the first time I desired something forbidden. They hinted that it would be frowned upon to talk to him, and so, the

others my age of course accepted it without question. I, however, was curious, and as such, wasn't particularly fond of this unwritten rule.

The night I slipped out of my bed to spy on him was the first time I had ever broken a rule. It was the first time I had ever gone against anything anyone had told me to do; it was the first time I had been disobedient, and it left my veins pumping with adrenaline and excitement. It was that night, that I saw him training for the first time. It was amazing to watch him move; for a man so bulky and awkward looking, he moved so gracefully, that his movements looked like a dance, albeit a deadly one. And if I were to have been scared of anything back then, I would have been scared of how something so beautiful could be so deadly; and if I could have felt fear, I would have been dreadfully afraid of how much I loved watching him, and how I couldn't help myself from coming back each and every night to watch him. I think that even from the beginning, he knew I was there, but that he simply said nothing. I think that perhaps he was... curious in his own way to find out why I was there; why I came back every night and hid at the window, watching him silently."

"It was fall when he finally called me out of my hiding place. That night, he simply just stopped in his motions suddenly and said 'Why don't you come inside to watch me this once? Its rather cold out there you know.'" Hidan laughed. "I remember being discovered scared shit of me... or err..." Hidan flushed as he realized he had just admitted to weakness, "I mean, I **WOULD** have been scared if I were a *everyday* person..." But by the looks on the faces of all in the room, it was obvious no one believed him.

"Er... anyway..." Hidan continued, "That night I came out form my hiding space and watched him train while sitting right there in plain view before him. He was even more impressive to watch at a closer proximity... and at the end of the night, he asked me why I kept coming back each day. Truthfully, before he asked me, I had never thought of the *why* before. I had just *wanted* too; there had never been need for a *reason* before! But now one little question forced me

to question myself: why *did* I keep coming back anyway? However, it turned out that the question was rhetorical, and it seemed he knew the answer that I myself hadn't yet figured out.

'You're curious,' he told me. 'You're drawn to the danger, and to the fact that its forbidden, and banned. You've never lived on the edge, have you?' he asked me, 'You've never done anything besides what you've been told, and you've always blindly followed whatever you've been asked to do, right?' I of course, hadn't a clue as to how to answer that, so I remained silent, which only evoked a chuckle from him."

"Don't know how to answer, huh? Well, you're a funny little kid, I'll give you that.' He told me with a laugh, ruffling my hair, 'I'll tell you what kid: because you amuse me, I'll train you a bit, hmm? How about that? Would you like that?' I was speechless, and thankful at that moment, and I simply nodded eagerly, agreeing to come back the next night to begin our training. And let me tell you, the guy didn't go easy on me; he was ruthless, brutal, and didn't believe that pain should hinder anyone from doing anything... so he made me do pushups until my arms wouldn't move anymore, and he made me kick and punch straw dummies until my fists and feet were bleeding and raw, all just to teach me one very essential lesson: what pain was, and how to become stronger than it. Before that moment, my life had been a very simple one that pain had never been a part of. Never before had I felt true *humbling* pain that caused my body to scream in agony and protest of its harsh treatment, and man was it hard to overcome it... but in the end, it made me feel so much more humble to my gods than I had ever felt before, and so much more thankful for what I had. I spoke to my new teacher about it, asking him what it meant, but he only smiled at me and ruffled my hair again telling me to figure it out on my own... however, after constant pleading on my behalf, he finally caved."

"The first thing you need to understand kid is that in this world there are many people who have many different ideas on how to worship "God". The people at this temple believe in quiet prayer, studying,

and meditation... but I don't believe in all that hoo-ha; personally, I believe that our Gods want more than weak people sitting around mumbling silly rhymes, and begging for forgiveness. This world is that of warriors kid, so it would make sense that we would have a warrior god; not some wimpy "god of the people". No, the god I believe in is a god that wants sacrifice and blood, and one that we are closest to when we are in pain, and striving to overcome what is seemingly impossible. It's that belief that got me here anyway; I was sent here, because the thought that being here would help me become a better person, and that it would help me repent for my sins. You see... I'm an S-ranked Criminal Ninja, and I've been labeled as such because I killed an entire civilian town bordering the Village Hidden in the Grass...' I asked him 'why?' feeling a little... er... *irked*, and not knowing why in the world this man that had become almost a role model to me had *killed* actual *people*. His answer however, was simple, and said with a smile: 'I killed them as a sacrifice to my Gods' he told me 'And though you may believe what you believe, I believe I live to sacrifice to my Gods.'"

"I think it was then that I started to question the life I was living; my entire life, I had let the elders spoon feed me everything that was supposedly the "absolute truth"... and I had lapped it all up without a second thought, but now, I was beginning to question if my entire way of life was right. It was also around that time that I discovered a gift that my teacher would later call a 'blessing from the gods.' My entire set of beliefs at the time stood on shaky ground, and surprisingly, the one that ultimately made me turn from my old viewpoints to see through new eyes, were the very monks who had originally stuffed their religious ideals down upon me.

I don't know how they knew of my training, but somehow, they found out, and came in the dead of night to my teacher's hut. I remember the monks trying to take me away, and my teacher trying to prevent them from doing so, but everything was happening so fast, and before I knew it, someone drew a weapon, and there was a scuffle between my teacher and the monks that happened too fast for me to follow... all I knew, was that it ended with a sword I had accidentally

gotten in the way of, piercing my torso. To say that everyone in the hut was horrified would be an understatement, but I-by far-was most defiantly the most terrified one in the room..."

"So FINALLY he admits it." Kakuzu interrupted, "Poor little Hidan, terrified of a little wound..."

"SHUT UP!" Hidan roared furiously, "MUST you interrupt at every little thing?" Kakuzu didn't answer, but merely looked amused, and motioned Hidan to continue.

"As I was *saying*," he continued, "Some monk had accidentally speared me with his weapon, striking a vital point that SHOULD have killed me, and at that moment, I was just *sure* it was all over... But a minute passed, and nothing happened. Two minutes, three... a full hour passed, and I still stood alive, with a sword in my chest. Of course, at that time, my Sensei seemed to have decided that enough was enough, and so he walked forward, and pulled the weapon from my body, and calmly went to his things, and pulled out a medical kit, and began to stitch up my pierced skin.

The monks, of course, were frightened by what they had witnessed, and fled at once, leaving me in my teacher's care. He cleaned, and sewed my wounds up silently, with a contemplative expression on his face. But I dared not ask what was on his mind; I too, however, couldn't speak, for I had things of my own to wonder about... like how I was still alive when that blow *should* have killed me. And it was then that my master spoke. 'That's a mighty fine gift you have there Hidan.' He told me, his voice bearing a unidentifiable emotion within it, 'It's a blessing from the Gods.' He assured me, 'It seems that the Gods have much in mind for you kid. The gift of immortality, and invulnerability... I believe you are meant to be a sacrificer Hidan; if you would, I believe that with your special powers, you could offer up many a sacrifice to the Gods, and thus, appeasing the Gods, and bringing a great peace to the world. I think, that you're meant to be a hero Hidan.' Naturally, I asked, 'Why me? Are the Gods truly those that you believe in, or is the true God the one that the monks believe in? Teacher, what should I do?' And honestly, he answered 'Do what

you think you should do.' And I think even at that moment, my mind was made up, and it was at that moment, that I was completely converted from my old religion to this new set of beliefs that had been introduced to me by my teacher. And that night, as a member of my new religion, I decided to offer up a great sacrifice to the Gods with my teacher's help. What was the sacrifice to be you ask? The sacrifice was to be every soul within the temple, and we swore we would finish the ceremony all before the sun rose on the new day."

"Though it was the first time I was in an actual fight, I could feel the God's power, and my teacher's reassuring presence cheering me on, and giving me the confidence, and the strength to kill them: all the monks who had once taught me to talk and walk, and even all the other boys who had once been my playmates. I killed each and every one of them, hardly flinching, because my purpose was greater than all their collective souls combined. I killed with the purpose of serving the Gods I had ignored for so many years in favor of worshipping false ones. To this day, I think they still call that old temple "the red temple", because even now, I think that all the walls are still colored red from the blood of all those who died there that day. But not a soul who died there that day mattered to me... well, that is, all but one. No matter how many times I was stabbed or wounded, I just kept going, but my teacher didn't have the same gift as I, and could only take so much. I am only thankful that he lived long enough to see the fruit of our efforts."

"'You did good kid.' He told me, his voice strained, and strangely weak, 'The Gods... most surely will be appeased. Here,' he told me, taking off his slashed ninja forehead protector, 'Take this; you're a far better ninja than some I've seen, so you deserve it.' I didn't know what to say. 'Teacher...' I began, but he cut me off. 'Don't call me that,' he told me, 'I am no longer your teacher; we are equals, so call me Miki kid: that's my given name... And never forget to serve your Gods well.' I can only say that I am glad he died knowing that someone would continue his fine religious work in the world. I traveled the world for several years after that on a religious pilgrimage, and never during that time did I go a day without

forgetting to offer up a sacrifice to the Gods. Soon after, I joined the Akatsuki, and the rest of the story is, as they say, history."

There was a pause in the room for a moment before at last, Kakuzu spoke: "And so you became an S-Ranked Nin then, huh?" Kakuzu questioned rubbing his chin thoughtfully, "Well, I *suppose* your rather spectacular slaughter at the end made up for your pitiful beginnings... but honestly, this is a bet that you've most certainly *lost* Hidan."

"Don't be so quick to judge Kakuzu." Itachi murmured, speaking for the first time that day, and thus startling almost everyone at the table. "So don't start bragging before you have obvious reason too."

Kakuzu huffed. " *FINE* then. But you'll see after I've told my tale Itachi-san, that I am the *clear* winner of *this* gamble.... Oy! Hidan, go find Kisame and see if he's gotten more sake, will you?"

"Fine, fine, I'm going, I'm going..."

"Get lost Kisame-san?" Hidan asked when he found his associate standing, looking out at the sunset.

"Hmm? Oh, no. I just stopped for a moment to watch the sunset. I'm sure the others will want their sake, so I'll just go bring that to them now..." and with that, the shark-man departed, leaving Hidan to stand alone on cliff for a moment, looking out where Kisame had just stood staring at the sunset only moments ago.

"A Blessing..." he whispered pensively, staring down at his hands, "Do you think I've used my gift well Miki?"

Hidan stood on the cliff silently for only a few more moments more before shaking his head with a sigh, and disappearing once more down into the darkness of the Akatsuki base.

A/N: Well, there you have it... And as always, Reviews are always loved and appreciated. :) Next up is Kakuzu!

EDIT: Sorry for the re-submission, but I needed to make some minor formatting changes.

Terms You Might Care To Know:

1- Miki: Japanese name that can be used for boys and girls that roughly means "tree"

Pyrofreeze